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Israelis and Germans Doubt Bulgarian Link in Attack on Pope

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JERUSALEM, Dec. 17 — Israeli and West German intelligence and security sources with a special interest in international terrorism are skeptical of charges of a Bulgarian connection in last year's attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II by a Turk.

Intelligence agencies in both countries, however, regard Bulgaria, as well as other countries of the Soviet bloc, as important links in a terrorist network.

The Soviet Union and its European allies, as well as China, North Korea, Cuba and Vietnam, are believed by Israeli intelligence officials to be supplying the various branches of the Palestine Liberation Organization — some of which are mutually antagonistic — with arms and training. The Palestinians, in turn, extend shelter, training and arms to other terrorist groups and sometimes recruit them for their operations.

The West German and Israeli agencies, which maintain close ties with their Italian counterparts, as they do with most others in pro-Western countries, do not regard the Italian secret services as of the highest standard.

Rivalry Among Italian Agencies

They fear that rivalry within the Italian internal security agencies, suspect evidence or outright "disinformation" may have played a role in the disclosure of information that caused an investigating magistrate, Ilario Martella, to have a Bulgarian airline official in Rome arrested last month on suspicion of "active complicity" in the attempted assassination of the Pope on May 13, 1981.

Mr. Martella has also moved for the lifting of diplomatic immunity from two members of the Bulgarian Embassy's staff, so that he may issue arrest warrants for them on related charges. Both have been withdrawn to Bulgaria.

The sources, interviewed in Israel and West Germany, do not claim possession of evidence exonerating Bulgarians from having aided Mehmet Ali Agca, who is serving a life term in Italy for having fired the shots that seriously wounded the Pope. But separately and firmly they stated their belief that Bulgaria, whose secret service they consider an adjunct of the Soviet K.G.B., would not have taken so grave a diplomatic risk for so nebulous a political advantage with such a high chance of the plot's disclosure.

The skepticism of the intelligence agencies is the more striking in Israel, which has waged a consistent campaign to convince the world that Palestinian terrorism is a creature of Soviet policy and the source of other terrorist acts in Western nations, and would have been happy to have been able to implicate Palestinians or Bulgarians.

Palestinians Reported in Bulgaria

The Israeli intelligence officials said that Israel had captured enough men, materiel and documentation during the war in Lebanon to sustain Israel's charges against the Soviet Union and its satellites. But they said they had seized no Western European or Japanese terrorists, only 28 Turks, in their occupation of Palestinian camps and bases.

They said they had shared documentary evidence of Turkish, West German, Italian and Irish terrorists who had been trained in Lebanese Palestinian camps with the governments concerned and would not be surprised if recent arrests of suspects, particularly in Italy and West Germany, had resulted from such intelligence.

Confirming a report from a high-ranking West German Interior Ministry official last week, an Israeli intelligence source said a number of Palestinian activists who had fled from Beirut during the Israeli siege had been given shelter in Bulgaria. He reported that three officers of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a leftist hard-line group headed by Dr. George Habash, were now staying at the Vitosha Hotel in Sofia.

Reports originating in Italy, believed to derive from continuing "concessions" by Mr. Agca, had described the Vitosha as a meeting place for terrorists, gunrunners and narcotics smugglers.

Cache of Arms Seized in 1980

The source said that Israeli intelligence had traced no movement of P.L.O. activists to other Communist countries since their departure from Beirut. But he said the grant of asylum to Palestinian militants marked the second time that Israeli intelligence had noted special Bulgarian consideration for such groups.

He said that in June 1980, two Palestinians of the Abu Nidal organization, an anti-P.L.O. terrorist group said to be operating on behalf of Iraqi intelligence mainly against Jewish targets in Western Europe, left Baghdad in a Mercedes-Benz 200 bearing Kuwaiti license

plates. Half of the fuel tank, he said, was taken up by a compartment that contained 30 Soviet-made Makarov and Tokarev pistols, four Polish-made WZ-63 submachine guns and 400 rounds of nine-millimeter ammunition.

The car crossed Turkey without being searched at the borders, but Bulgarian inspectors discovered the cache. The men were jailed, but 35 days later they were said to have been released and the arms placed back in the fuel tank. The car crossed Yugoslavia and Italy unscathed, and the source said the trail petered out when in late July, in Rome, an Italian and a man of Middle Eastern appearance carried the arms and ammunition off in large suitcases.

Attack Used to Justify Invasion

Asserting another link between the Communist country and Palestinian terrorism, an official placed on his desk a WZ-63 submachine gun, which he said was the weapon with which the Israeli Ambassador in Britain, Shlomo Argov, was critically wounded last June.

He said that the gun had traveled from Warsaw to Baghdad and then to London in the Iraqi diplomatic pouch. In London it was handed to the assassins. The attempted assassination was invoked by Israel to justify its invasion of Lebanon.

Israeli intelligence sources also said they had evidence that two West German women who took part on Sept. 15, 1981, in an attack with guns and anti-tank grenades against the car in which the commander of the United States Army in Europe, Gen. Frederick J. Kroesen, was traveling near Heidelberg, had been trained in a Palestinian camp in Tyre, Lebanon. Moreover, the Israelis claimed the grenades had been smuggled to Germany in the Syrian diplomatic pouch.

Other sources said the attack on the general, who escaped injury, had been part of a conspiracy to strike at American targets throughout Europe that had been decided on at a meeting in Lausanne, Switzerland, the preceding July by European and Palestinian terrorists. They included the Red Brigades of Italy, the German Red Army faction, the Basque E.T.A., the Irish Republican Army and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

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